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ABSTRACT

Partly in response to reformists' warnings concerning educators preparation, a formal partnership between Brigham Young University (BYU) (Utah) College of Education and five surrounding school districts was established. Acknowledging the innovative, experimental nature of this endeavor, founders began with a set of common interests, focused mainly on improvement of schooling, and agreed to establish policies and goals as needed. Noting the dearth of information on functioning partnerships, this paper briefly describes several components of the BYU-Public School Partnership, outlines the questions and naturalistic design used to study this collaborative effort, and summarizes a few patterns or hypotheses emerging from this inquiry. The partnership involves a wide spectrum of activities, persons, organizations, and ideas, including: the five school districts and an entire university; an active governing board; an executive director housed at the university; a coordinating council; six task forces; a new principal preparation program; 13 schools involved in intensive, daily collaboration on instructional and teacher preparation programs; and informal partnering activities at both local and national levels. The bulk of the paper discusses emerging patterns concerning trust, collegiality, symbiotic relationships, an authoritarian governing board, the communication process, institutional versus individual interests, "king pin" individuals' roles, and the evaluation process. (MLH)

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Analyzing a University-Public School
Collaboration to Reform Education

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Introduction

Since 1982, national, state and local public attention has focused heavily on public education and the preparation of educators. National reports from a variety of sources have warned public school personnel and schools of education which prepare educators that they must improve the quality of education.

Partially in response to these warnings, a formal Partnership was established and began functioning between the Brigham Young University College of Education and five surrounding school districts. The founders of the Partnership acknowledged from the beginning that this endeavor was innovative and experimental. They began with a set of common interests, focused primarily on the improvement of schooling, and agreed to establish policies and goals as needed along the way.

Although there is considerable literature on the notion of partnerships between schools, universities, businesses, parents, etc., formal agreements such as this Partnership (intended to encourage comprehensive renewal of college programs and personnel as well as those of the schools in a truly symbiotic relationship) are rare (Gilman, 1985; Wilbur, 1985; and Williams, 1986). Even for those few consortia that do exist, next to nothing is known about how they came to be, how the people in them work together, how they impact on education and learning, and so on. In response, this indepth and ongoing study is being conducted of a University-Public School Partnership as it develops.

This presentation briefly describes several components of the BYU- Public School Partnership, outlines the questions and naturalistic design used to study this collaborative effort, and summarizes a few patterns or hypotheses about such innovations which are emerging from this inquiry.

Components of the Partnership

The Partnership involves an immense spectrum of activities, persons, organizations, and ideas, including but not limited to:

1. Five school districts (varying from 2,000 students in a remote rural area to about 40,000 in a suburban area) and an entire university (not just the College of Education),

2. An active Governing Board, consisting of the superintendents of the school districts and the Dean of the BYU College of Education, which meets monthly to review activities of various components of the Partnership and to set policy,

3. An Executive Director who is housed at the university but is responsible to the entire Governing Board to promote the policies they set, represent the Partnership to outside agencies, facilitate communication within the Partnership as well as with other interested parties, encourage research, evaluation, and development projects, seek external funding for the Partnership generally, and document the evolution of this collaborative effort.

4. An active Coordinating Council (consisting of district staff representatives, an associate dean from BYU and the Executive Director) which meets monthly to monitor activities of the task forces and others in the Partnership and to plan strategies for implementing the policies set by the Governing Board,

5. Six task forces (administrator preparation, teacher preparation, guidance and counseling, special education, gifted and talented, and research and evaluation) with more being formed (foreign language diversification, teaching of thinking, and instructional delivery) to bring together teachers and administrators from the five school districts with faculty and administrators from BYU to jointly tackle problems at the request of the Governing Board,

6. A new principal preparation program in which interns spend the majority of their program working in schools with "mentor principals" (created by the Task Force on administrator preparation and piloted during the 1986-87 school year),

7. Four key schools and 9 focus schools in which university faculty and school personnel are collaborating on a daily basis to develop curriculum, explore teaching strategies, prepare future educators, inservice practicing educators, conduct research and evaluation, and otherwise address the purposes of the Partnership (began in the Fall, 1986),

8. Many informal partnership activities that occur between school personnel and university personnel and the perceptions of all the potential participants in the schools and university who may or may not be formally involved currently,

9. Activities of people in this Partnership who are participating with many others in several partnerships in a National Network which was recently organized by John Goodlad to study the role of such collaborative efforts in the renewal of education.

Questions and Methods

A naturalistic inquiry design is being used to study this complex phenomenon because of the need to understand how the Partnership members interact and perform their functions as they naturally do so. Intervention and manipulation of variables by the investigators is avoided. Rather, an historical analysis of the Partnership until the current era was made and detailed descriptions of ongoing activities and participants' perspectives will be compiled throughout the study. There is no systematic effort to change what is observed.

Questions. A small set of foreshadowed questions provided a rationale for beginning the study; but new issues have emerged and more will evolve as the study proceeds. Some of the initial questions were:

1. How did the Partnership form and begin operation and how do operations change over time and why?
2. What were and are various participating organizations' needs and their members' motives for joining forces in this way and continuing to cooperate?
3. How do relationships among participants (particularly those from the university with those from the schools) develop and impact on outcomes?
4. What are the different roles played by each of the participants? How do university personnels' teaching, scholarship and service roles change? How do school personnels' teaching and scholarship roles change?
5. How are policies made and enacted?
6. What are the most likely outcomes to be associated with the Partnership for the BYU programs and faculty and for the school personnel and students?
7. Does participation in the Partnership encourage faculty and school reforms? If so, how and what kinds? If not, why?
8. What are the communication patterns within the Partnership and what are the implications for education and learning generally?
9. What role does the National Network of partnerships to which this Partnership belongs play?
10. What problems are encountered and how are they addressed?

Methods. Because the Partnership is quite large, a variety of sampling procedures is used to focus attention on selected components of this huge "case." Purposive sampling predominates. For example, to describe relationships between school and university personnel, meetings and communications of members of various Task Forces are observed (as are less formal interactions as they are

discovered). Likewise, snowball samples are used as participants suggest other sources of information.

The principal instruments are the researchers who employ interview schedules, questionnaires, participant observations, systematic observations, and document analyses, in gathering data. The exact nature of these tools evolves as the study progresses and their specific utility becomes apparent. The researchers coordinate their efforts so that whenever possible, parallel forms of data are collected to facilitate aggregation of results across settings and sites. The researchers maintain records of data collection procedures and findings, documenting how the instrumentation develops. Records of researchers' emotional and personal reactions to the informants and the objects of study are also kept. The resulting data record contains transcripts of interviews, extensive observation notes, on-going analyses and syntheses of results, and narrative portrayals of the context in which the study is taking place.

Analysis of fieldnotes occurs throughout the data collection phases and continues as the collection continues (and will throughout the life of the Partnership). Researchers analyze the data descriptively and interpretively, seeking for grounded theory. More extensive reports than can be presented at AERA provide the reader with plenty of raw description so alternative interpretations of the data are facilitated and the reader can vicariously experience some of the impressions and perceptions of the researchers. These ongoing analyses are also used to modify collection activities in response to emphases discovered in the data.

Emerging Hypotheses

Several patterns, themes, and hypotheses have become apparent during the naturalistic study of the BYU-Public School Partnership. Although some of these

may be unique to this collaborative innovation, formal verification procedures within this study and across the several partnerships in the National Network will be used to test and refine these initial hypotheses. Likewise, they are presented here to elicit reaction and feedback.

Building Trust. "We didn't realize how different we really were!" This comment by the BYU College of Education Dean reflecting on the evolving relationship of the university with the schools in the Partnership reveals one of the biggest hurdles this collaborative effort has faced and continues to struggle with after three years. To symbiotically realize mutual self-interests, the participating parties have to trust one another; but universities and schools have plenty of traditional reasons not to trust their "partners."

During the first few months of existence, members of all the task forces have spent hours defending their ideas, clarifying their purpose in meeting, learning to listen to perspectives they disliked, worrying that they would be overrun by "the other side", expressing skepticism, feeling like they were wasting time because they were not addressing the official agenda, and in many other ways building a group rapport and identity. No one predicted that so many pent up fears and doubts due to previous experiences would have to be overcome before the intended collaborative work could even begin.

The Administrative Preparation Task Force, which eventually produced the highly touted Principal Preparation Program, provides an excellent example. During the first three or four meetings, principals were overheard to say, "I don't think BYU really cares what I think about how they prepare Principals. This is all just a facade-- a P.R. act to make us think they might change." Others complained, "I can't keep leaving my school to listen to all this; I don't think it is going to make any difference." BYU representatives didn't mutter much but they dominated the dialogue and often all participants sat and listened to university professors

arguing their pet theories about esoteric skills none of the practicing principals found relevant to their jobs.

Attendance declined and eventually, the co-chairman from BYU instructed the secretary to include a note in the minutes telling the group that the task force was to be dissolved because he didn't believe they were making any progress. When the other co-chairperson read these minutes, she called everyone and found that no one else had understood that the group was through. This threat of abolishment united them to overcome their many differences long enough to keep meeting and to address the official agenda.

When the BYU faculty realized that the school representatives really were interested in contributing to a new program and that they had valid concerns to share and when the people from the schools saw that this was a chance to express themselves and they would just have to trust the BYU faculty to do something meaningful with their input, the group got serious about reviewing and revising the principal training curriculum. But even now that a program is being piloted, all parties are still skeptical. The Governing Board is insisting that in addition to internal formative evaluation of the program, external summative evaluation is needed to see how well BYU is implementing the program which the task force designed.

Developing Collegiality. Related to this concern has been the challenge of developing a sense of collegiality and mutual respect among the members of the Partnership. The Dean and the Superintendents work well as peers; but many of the teachers and principals working with the university faculty on task forces took their degrees under these same persons and struggle to feel like true colleagues. Also, because most of the task forces have been formed to develop recommendations for improving the university's programs in light of real world

concerns, the College faculty realize they are rusty and some feel inferior to the school representatives.

Even "small" details contribute to the problem. For example, when the "field programs" university committee began meeting to follow up on recommendations of the first Teacher Preparation Task Force, they met on the BYU campus. They invited several representatives from the schools to meet with them, but forgot to provide parking passes for the "visitors." As a result, the school representatives were late and received the message that they were not being welcomed as equals. When people are afraid of pending changes, new time demands and the threat of losing what autonomy they believe they have, it is even harder to establish confidence in their ability to cooperate as colleagues with the people they believe are threatening them.

True Symbiosis? A quick review of the task forces indicates that the first two were created when the Partnership was formed (Administrative and Teacher Preparation) with the goal of improving university programs. Only one of the existing groups was initiated by the public schools (Special Education by one of the superintendents) while two others are still being considered (Thinking and Learning Strategies). All the other task forces have come about at the request of personnel from the university. Even more fundamentally, the Partnership itself began at the suggestion of the university and its quasi-representative, John Goodlad who had been hired to advise the university about how to do something useful for educational renewal. For the first two years of the consortium, the Dean of the College and the faculty member acting as "Executive Secretary" essentially controlled the agenda of the Governing Board.

Also, unlike several other partnerships that are forming, Partnership members have been slow to discuss the matter of financial support for the Partnership. A small grant from the Utah State Office of Education has provided

sufficient support for initial efforts. The school districts have employed substitute teachers to replace school representatives who participate on task forces, while the university has provided faculty and graduate student time to support the Partnership. However, BYU has also paid for the executive officers, their offices, travel and other expenses. Insofar as the amount of money an institution is willing to contribute is an indicator of that institution's commitment, this pattern is cause for some concern.

The schools in Utah are severely strapped financially. For example, using the dollars spent per year per pupil in 1985-86 as an index, Utah is the lowest in the United States (mean of \$2,100 per student compared to the national average of \$3,200) and Alpine District is the lowest in Utah (\$1,870 per student). Pressure to increase educational productivity at the same or lower cost levels is intense throughout the Partnership districts. The superintendents have hesitated to petition their school boards for funding to participate in the Partnership more equitably. And perhaps the schools are already paying their share if percentage of funds available is used as the index instead of absolute contribution. But, if all are to be equal partners, it seems critical to find ways for all participants to contribute a reasonable proportion of the operating expenses.

It could be argued that in a truly symbiotic relationship, whatever is good for one partner is good for the other. But this imbalance in the initiation of task forces and the financing of activities suggests that perhaps the university's self interests are being emphasized much more than those of the schools. The superintendents have frequently claimed that they anticipate benefitting from the expertise of college faculty, improved academic programs and financial resources of the university in improving their schools. So perhaps they will have their interests met if they can help the university personnel meet their interests, which would also enhance the quality of those resources. This remains to be seen.

Authoritarian Governing Board. Although most of them approve of the Partnership in principle, many of the school district and university personnel acknowledge that the Governing Board formed the consortium as a formal organization and then imposed it on their respective institutions. The superintendents, dean and department chairpersons did not poll their constituents as democratic representatives to see if they were interested. They assumed that they could sell their school boards, central administrators and the faculty and staff who would do much of the collaborating on the idea once the relationship was confirmed.

The accuracy of this perception is confirmed by the way members of the task forces have been selected. Rather than invite volunteers to nominate themselves to serve, the dean and superintendents have assigned their representatives to the task forces. Likewise, superintendents took the central role in selecting the schools that became Partner Schools, inspite of the Teacher Preparation Task Force's recommendation that school staffs should have the opportunity to discuss the concept and apply for consideration.

A related issue the Governing Board faces is deciding how much and what responsibilities to delegate to others. So far, there has been a general feeling of anxiety among Board members about people doing things in the name of the Partnership without review and approval of the Board. Although they have assigned task forces to discuss issues and present options to them, they have reserved ultimate decision making power to themselves, making the task force members hesitant to consider some alternative recommendations because they lack the authority to enact them. The Board has tended to want to review all proposals, make all assignments and make all decisions; but too much is going on for them to continue do so. This past year, the Board established the Coordinating

Council to share some of this burden, but it remains to be seen how they will use this group.

All this suggests that the authoritarian role the Board has taken may have been useful in getting the Partnership off the ground quickly; but for true collaboration to take place at the school and individual participant level, it may be necessary for Board members to delegate much more responsibility for initiating collaborative activities and making decisions to these lower levels.

Communication. A continual problem is lack of communication. Even after two years, many people in the schools and university know very little about the Partnership and what they can do with it to help them improve. Task force members are unaware of what other task forces are doing (e.g., the Gifted and Talented Task Force and the Regional Language Planning Group are both promoting Japanese language instruction independently). In spite of fairly regular reports by co-chairpersons, the Governing Board is often uniformed or misinformed about the activities of the task forces. Likewise, the task force members spend much of their meeting time debating the intent and interests of the Governing Board because they do not have clear information from that body.

Lack of communication not only hinders formal collaboration efforts, it prevents the informal networking among the individuals in the participating organizations who could otherwise mushroom cooperative efforts in unimagined ways. A brochure has been produced and a newsletter is in the planning stages. These tools may alleviate the problem, but other ways to inform and involve members of the participating organizations need to be explored. The Executive Director and the Coordinating Council are exploring ways to connect people throughout the five districts and the entire university who have similar interests.

Institution Versus Individual. Institutional and individual self-interests are diverse and often divergent. In spite of the claim that collaboration

can facilitate the achievement of common self-interests of institutions, the individuals who must cooperate to meet those goals have their own self-interests which must be met before or as they work for the common good. There is some indication that the organizations participating in the Partnership are not oriented to reward individuals for their efforts to satisfy the institutions' self-interests.

For example, in the university, publications in journals are the major requirement for advancement and reward. So it is in the self-interest of faculty to spend their time doing research and publishing that work. So far, the activities of the task forces, Coordinating Council and Partner Schools have focused on committee discussion, curriculum development, and the beginnings of evaluation design. Faculty who have participated have had less time to conduct research and publish. The university reward system is not set up to promote them for the efforts they have made to meet the university's "self-interests" via the Partnership. Arrangements may change so such effort is rewarded or so that faculty can conduct research that is publishable through the Partnership; but until then, the institutional and individual self-interests appear to be in conflict.

In the schools, principals and teachers are rewarded for the services they provide their constituents. Although participation on task forces and other Partnership bodies may eventually help them and other principals and teachers to serve the public better, the rewards associated with those impacts will be long in coming. Unless there are more immediate rewards for collaborative efforts, the individual self-interests of school personnel will remain unmet while they are addressing the institutions' interests.

King Pins. Key individuals play important roles in the activities and progress of the Partnership-- both positive and negative. As these individuals take new assignments, move, or change their focus, entire components of the collaborative effort are modified. As summarized earlier, John Goodlad played a

critical role in getting this Partnership started. He was able to meet separately with the potential members of the collaboration and identify common interests which could cement the relationship. He continued to visit Utah and meet with task forces and the Governing Board for several months. But those contacts have diminished and others have taken the leadership and facilitating roles.

The BYU Dean of the College of Education who first invited Goodlad to visit the university made a significant contribution but was replaced before Goodlad made his very first visit. The succeeding Dean has spearheaded the formation of many of the task forces by inviting the schools to help him and his associates review and revise BYU's programs.

The first chairman of the Governing Board was a strong leader who set the tone for the first six months until he took another superintendancy. There was then a brief period when some participants nervously watched to see if the schools would maintain their interest and continue participating actively. They did, but the new chairman took a much more authoritative role, changing the Board's role slightly.

Two new superintendents to the Board have recommended new task forces, whereas none of the original Board members took that initiative. An associate dean has actively promoted the formalization of the Partner School concept and the selection of some initial schools to test the idea empirically. If it weren't for him, nothing might have been done in this area. Likewise, the BYU faculty who have requested the formation of the several task forces have been king pins in forming the Partnership into the configuration it has taken.

Evaluation. Finally, there is the issue of how best to evaluate progress. A series of naturalistic studies have been initiated to describe and facilitate the assessment of how the Partnership generally is functioning. Likewise, the Governing Board has requested that all individual programs and projects sponsored

by the Partnership (like the Principal Preparation Program) be evaluated formatively and summatively. The Research and Evaluation Task Force has been appointed to advise the Governing Board on how to do this appropriately. The Coordinating Council members have divided up the task forces among themselves so each person is responsible for monitoring the efforts of one to two task forces and reporting on progress to the Council and the Governing Board. A task force has been formed in the National Network of Partnerships to address these issues as well. People are anxious to make sure all this effort is worth the the costs.

Ideally, all Partnership participants should be interested in critically reviewing what they are doing and what they can learn from the experience. But most of the evaluation plans appear to be externally imposed. The Governing Board wants to know how the task forces and the programs they produce are doing but they have no plans for evaluating their own performance. Very few of the task forces have systematically planned evaluations of their efforts. Unless there is interest in self evaluation, participants will not learn all they could from this innovative experiment.

Conclusion

These are just a sample of the many patterns being discovered through the ongoing naturalistic investigation of a new university-public school partnership. As participants explore the use of key or partner schools, a new mentor and on-site based principal preparation program, and other collaborative efforts, implementation and outcomes are being examined. These findings will be useful to others who are contemplating or expanding their own collaborative efforts. More importantly, investigation of the experiences in this Partnership will provide critical insights into the role of such cooperative efforts for the improvement of education generally.

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